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A Lover's Ephemeris



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A
LOVER'S
EPHEMERIS



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A LOVER'S EPHEMERIS

TO
B.K.L.

A LOVER'S EPHEMERIS

By
Louis Lavater

Author of "Blue Days and Grey Days."

Commonwealth of Australia
Sydney J. Endacott
MELBOURNE
1917

Printed at The Galleon Press, Surrey Hills, Vic.
for S. J. Endacott, 14 Cumming St., Moonee Vale, Vic.

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DUALITY

MY nature has been cast in such a mould
That while I live I am the alternate prey
Of two conflicting moods; no middle way
Seems open to me till death leave me cold.
I would be what I cannot be, would hold
That which I cannot hold: then on a day
I put aside all struggle, fret or fray,
All quest of place or power or greed of gold.

I have been dreaming. I have plucked sweet flowers
Of idleness, enjoyed what I love best
Of book or brook or smile at passing jest—
And now the fateful change before me lowers!
This night shall I know neither sleep nor rest,
But turn and turn and lash the laggard hours.

“There is a budding morrow in midnight.”

—JOHN KEATS.

A T S U N S E T

THE sun drops swiftly as a wounded bird,
And careless clouds that all day long have lain
Asleep at anchor in the aery main
Now gather westward, grey-grown, gloomy, blurred,
As summoned thither by his voice, unheard,
Speaking in fire and answered so again:
He looms majestic as the echoes wane,
And night's dark utterance veils his glowing word.

My listening eyes are ears to catch the story:
Thus every day some splendid hope must die,
Each night the ineffectual stars be strewn;
Or, lanterning the lonely waste of sky,
Remembrance rise—that melancholy moon,
That pale dead spectre of departed glory!

WHITE MAGIC

THROUGH clefts and crannies of the darkness glide
The long white fingers of the pallid moon;
She kneels upon the verge; then, rising soon,
Casts her adrift and swims the sullen tide.
And lo! the deeps where furtive shadows hide
Are turned to wine-of-amber, senses swoon
And weird imaginings but reach their noon
Which drowned in darkness else had slowly died.

Beneath the beading surface, fathoms down,
Do huddled houses lie, or in their place
A ghostly semblance. There's no dwelling-space
'Twixt wall and wall, but glimmery silver sheets
Buttressed with ebony—a phantom town
Where shrouded spectres goggle in the streets.

PRISONER'S CAPTIVE

LIKE clumsy screed that mars a palimpsest
My seeming life is but an overlay
Upon a song that will not pass away
Till all dissolve in death's pale alkahest.
I hold a memory prisoned in my breast
Too precious to set free, too fair to slay,
Too eloquent to silence or gainsay:
At once my bitter joy, my sweet unrest.

I dare not trust the warders—Hands or Feet
Or Eyes or slippery Tongue—to be discreet;
In loyal treason even Truth may err.
When sleep their disaffection overpowers
Then only am I free: in waking hours
I am the captive of my prisoner.

THE WITCHERY OF NIGHT

BEFORE the purple curtain of the night
A silver-burnished lamp is hung, so near
One's hand might almost touch it. I can hear,
As though they muttered some mysterious rite,
A drone of voices hushed and recondite;
Dusk-haunting shadows breathe into my ear
Dream-fancies, dead alas! for many a year
(Or do they murmur "No, not quite—not quite?")
Whilst thoughts, like sentient things, come from afar
To soothe me with their silken fingers. Thus
Hath night the witching power to soften and change
Day's crude designs into the marvellous—
Make distance intimate or known things strange,
Blot out an ocean or unveil a star!

DIVINATION

SLOW dies the midnight hour with muffled clang;
Slow and by imperceptible degrees,
Even as I strive to turn its treasured leaves,
The book slides gently from my slackening grasp;
Slow droops the flame within the shaded lamp
And my soul drifts along the drowsy sea
That laves the lonely island-shores of sleep
Through twilights dim as when the world began.

At length, vaguely, as 'twere a dream outlined
Upon a dream I see a faint shape grow
Less faint than that which looms beyond . . . it shows
Elusive as a moonray's misty shine
In winter . . . Honey-cries hive in my throat
And thy dear image trembles to a smile.

THE DARKEST HOUR

NOW moonlight fails and the slow dark comes down
In heavy flakes of silence, drifting deep
Alike o'er valley and its watching steep
And forest glade and field with furrows brown,
Dulling the distant murmurs of the town
And pressing tight the bandages of sleep
On laughing eyes, perchance on eyes that weep—
O'er half a world the night-drift slowly settles down.

And—do I dream? I know not. But this much
I know: through shining distances enorme
I wander hand in hand of a loved form
Dearer than all (for there's no other such!)
Unto a heaven where rosy-hued and warm
Love reigns as king, and I am knighted at his touch.

A DREAM VOYAGE

WHEN o'er night's dusky ocean swims the moon,
Majestical although so wan and pale,
And curious stars, wherewith the heavens are strewn,
Gather to watch her gleaming silver sail;
Then does my fancy grow to its full measure
And count the stars as they were miser's treasure.

But, when I'd sum the tale of starry treasure
Or clasp the silver splendours of the moon,
They dance away in a wild witch's-measure
Till fancy waxes as the white moon pale
Drifting in tatters like a storm-torn sail
Upon the shores of slumber to lie strewn.

Along the coasts of that dim island strewn
What hoards must be of long-forgotten treasure!
Whither our dream-barks drift with drooping sail,
Where the low sky has neither stars nor moon
But such as move and shine beyond the pale
Of knowledge, and where time nor space has measure.

"One that in a silver vision floats."

—PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY.

So in my heart are hopes I cannot measure
That scatter from me as rose-leaves are strewn—
Sweet-scented blossoms, petals pink and pale—
How may I tell of such a priceless treasure?
No dream like this beneath the witchèd moon
Since my swift shallop spread her silken sail!

Hopes rustle gently in the flapping sail:
It lifts—it fills! No need for further measure!
What care I now for argent-wingèd moon
Or wide-eyed stars along the heavens strewn?
My ship is freighted with a dearer treasure
Beside whose riches all their splendours pale.

Splendours of stars and of the moon grow pale
When they behold my little shallop sail
Unto that haven of the heart I treasure
Above all earthly estimate or measure,
Whose blisses like the hosts of heaven are strewn—
Love! that endures beyond the stars or moon.

O white witch-moon my mast-head would impale;
Stars silver-strewn, hid by the swelling sail—
Ye cannot measure my uncounted treasure!

THE AWAKENING

MORNING hath set his banner in the sky
And flung his bright battalions' brave array
Where'er night's frowning garrisons at bay
Prolong resistance. See! they break, they fly!
Whilst the loud birds, like feathered buglers, cry
The matin-call that heralds the new day,
Daring the dusky foe to say him nay
When he deploys his white artillery.

Swiftly the fortress of my heart is taken,
Its bastion breached and my pale prisoner free
Whom to deliver hath enlarged me;
For this I gain by being so forsaken—
No longer fettered to a gaoler's key
Love's knight am I, and to his quest awaken.

“Morning, touched with quivering fire.”

—WILLIAM CALDWELL ROSCOE.

A THOUSAND TIMES

..... and once again *I love thee!* All my soul
Rushes impetuous to my widowed lips
Whenas I snatch them from thy finger-tips
To vow *I love thee!* On thy heart's white scroll
I write these words *I love thee* for my whole
Evangel, and around thy throat that dips
Beneath thy bodice in a blue eclipse
I draw *I love thee* like a silken stole.

Dear, the insistence of my love is such
That I must needs rehearse it early and late;
Nor weary not, for should it be my fate
By some chance witchery of tone or touch
To win thee with a word reiterate
A thousand thousand times were not too much.

HANDS, HEART AND THOUGHTS

HANDS that shall busy them to ward away
The world's rough elbow, and to win for thee
Such garnered chattel-store from day to day
As thou desirest or as need may be:
Heart that shall hive or hold in loving-fee
Thy kisses, tears, and all such precious plunder,
That I may draw upon its treasury
Should we be found some dreary day asunder:
And thoughts—ah! thoughts that over thee and under
And all about thee circling ever go,
That never thus were freighted with sweet wonder
And glad surprise until thou madest them so—

Thoughts do I give, heart's-fill of joy or weeping
And both my hands into thy tender keeping.

SEVEN REASONS

WHY do I love thee? Dear, for every reason
That I may plead in starry courts above—
Because God surely fashioned thee for love,
As sweetest blossom hath most honey-bees on,
And so to love thee not were worse than treason:
Because thy call is throaty like the dove:
Because thou'rt packed with sweetness as this glove
With thee: because the year's at loving-season:
Because, dear heart, thou askest why and why:
Because thou lovest me (ah! blest am I
Beyond all other lovers far or near):
Because—well just because I love thee, dear:
Or, having given thee good reasons seven,
For any other reason under heaven.

LOVER'S-LOGIC

EARTH with a tender radiance all a-shine,
New-caught from heaven as through an open door:
A sun more golden-bright than e'er before:
Night's winking lanterns burnished ne'er so fine:
Heart brimming happiness like heady wine
That rises to the lips and bubbles o'er:
All these delights and many marvels more
Three words may total—Beatrice is mine.

On Sundays, flaunting all their ribbons brave,
I watch the lads and lasses as they go
Exulting forth, or homeward linger slow,
And smile indulgent on their shameless bliss:
They love (thou sayest), they are beloved, they have
Their heart's desire—but I have Beatrice.

ATTESTATION

DEAREST, while this dull body worms its way
From dark to dark through darkness how my soul
For ever would pursue a separate goal
With faintings, flutterings, doubtings yea or nay!
What rosy ardours, what wan droopings grey
Beset it! In what dismal night of dole
Would it transcend its boundaries, paying toll,
To win with thee unto the wide blue day!

Hear me, heart's-core of all things loveliest!
This is my prayer—as I do now attest
By faithful word in this fair-drawn indenture—
I pray thy spirit compass me about
Like a blue nooning, shadowless of doubt,
When fares my soul upon its last adventure.

THE MEASURE OF LOVE

WHO can appraise, who would with paltry yardstick
measure

A great gift greatly given? And should that gift be love
Stint not thy prayers, for it is holy far above
Our cramp't imaginings. The miser counts his treasure
By tale of meannesses; having no fruit, nor leisure
To pluck it if he had: who travaileth to move
A niggard mistress hath no need, by Heaven! to prove
He oweth naught for dole of dearly-purchased pleasure:
But thee—sweet-smelling thoughts of whom, like flowers,
invade

The thickets of my soul where no spring used to be—
Because thou givest all thine all ungrudgingly,
Because thou squanderest great gladness, unafraid,
Thee only will I love whilst there is breath in me
Holding thee dearest of all things that God hath made.

A GROOMSONG

LET me be early, that no peeping sun
Cry shame upon me for a laggard groom:
Let me be risen and my day begun
Before the sun hath set the hills a-bloom
Or freed the faint perfume
Of waking meadows. Let me leap from bed
To bathe this body and these glowing limbs
And utter all my soul in songs and hymns
The like of which were never sung nor said
Nor written to be read:
And let me choose from garments in array
The whitest linen and this suit of grey
Whate'er be pleasing in the eyes of her
For whose delight they have been laid away
And sprinkled o'er with myrrh
Rose-leaves and lavender
Against this moment whereto I was born,
The flower of all my days and my sweet marriage-morn.

“This is that happy morn.”

—DRUMMOND OF HAWTHORNDEN.

And forth into the open let me go
To drink the breath of morning and to greet
The shining messenger of love, that so
I miss no joy of him, nor any sweet,
Nor vex my happy feet
With vain delays whenas his rosy fingers
Are busy at day's door. See how he peeps
Above yon eastern rim where still she sleeps
Whose hour has come and mine; and how he lingers
To wake the morning-singers
Before her window ere he sweeps along
His God-appointed road in majesty,
Paling the ineffectual starry throng
And scattering life and light and love and song
So at the hour shall be
A splendour about me,
The golden splendour whereto I was born,
The glory of my days and my sweet marriage-morn.

From water-runnel and from reedy stem,
From quiring trees with leafy trebles crowned,
From throats so many there's no counting them,
From every hollow harbouring a sweet sound,
Yea, even from the ground
Rise murmurous madrigals that catch and croon
And chime in many-changing harmonies,
Wherein each rapturous voice with all agrees,
And not a blade of grass is out of tune
Almost my senses swoon
As something in my heart responsive sings
Through wildered quarter-tones and quaverings
A song of ravishment and soul's-allure
Such as is heard among the whispering strings
Unearthly-sweet and pure
Of a soft *viol d'amour*.
This is the music whereto I was born,
Fit for this day of days and my sweet marriage-morn.

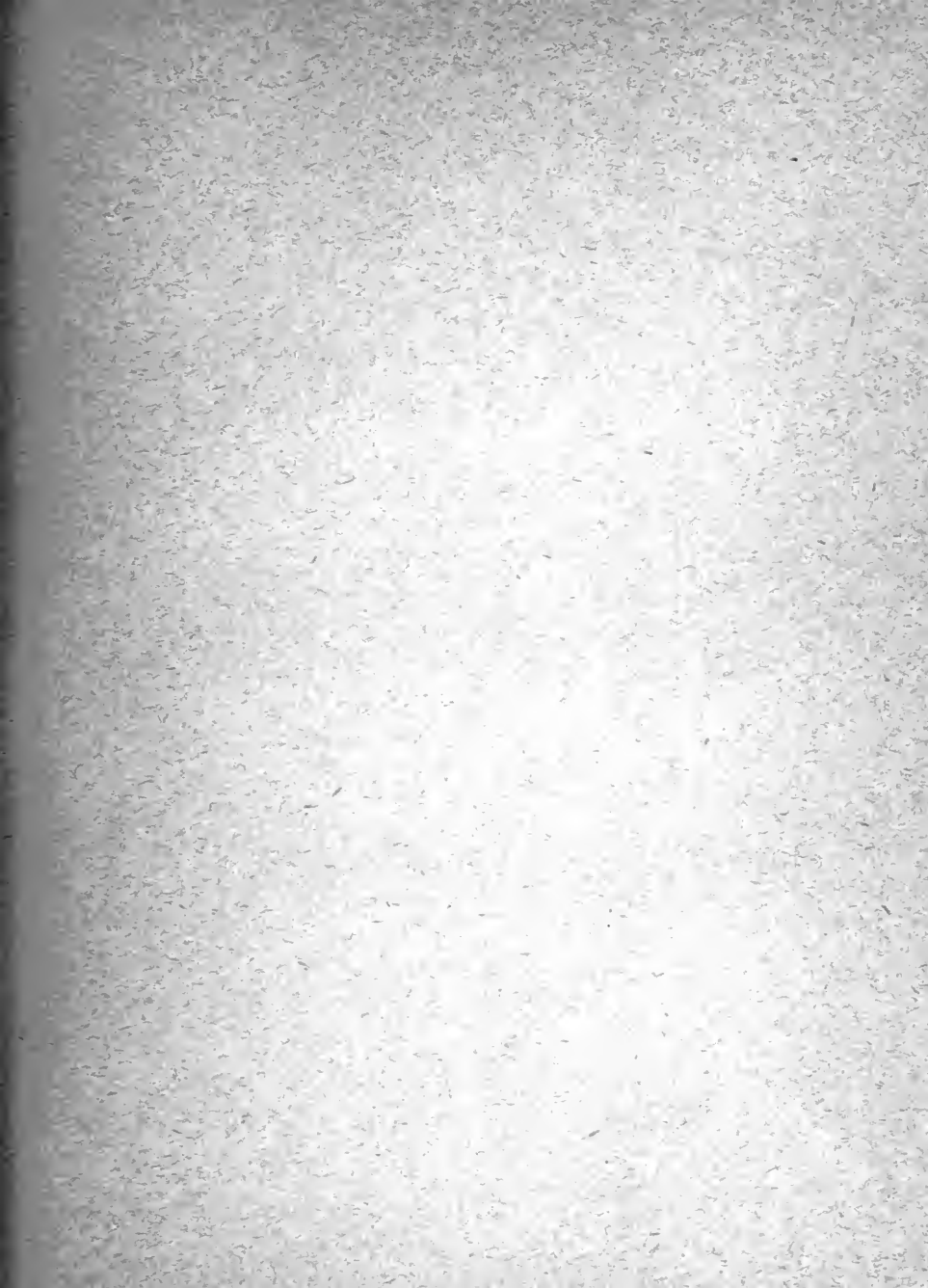
I breathe the very air of heaven, laced
With a sweet savour of supreme delight—
Sweeter than is the cleanly salt sea-taste
Of spray far-flung upon a windy height
Or tangled reek at night
Along the borders of an unspoiled stream:
Sweeter than mint or flakes of manna spilled
From sappy trees or fragrant earth fresh-tilled:
Than spice of bay or coaxing of cool cream
Or (fleeting as a dream)
The gust of alpine strawberries. Could there run
Into a swift alembic craftily
The souls of all sweet things beneath the sun
And all their essences be blent in one,
Ah, not so sweet for me
Their quintessence would be
As this, the nectar whereto I was born,
The honey-dew of days and my sweet marriage-morn.

It may be now she opens her dear eyes
Misty with dreams and all suffused with love,
And deepening bluely till a soft surprise
Flutters into them like a nesting dove.
Not the blue maze above
With all its lure of endless veiled abysses
Or foam of stars flecking a purple sea
Can so entangle all the thoughts of me
As those blue heavens, starred with a thousand blisses
And bluer even than this is,
And more mysterious and more full of wonder
Than any watery lover of the moon
Thus do my thoughts, like fountains burst asunder,
Gather in flood and bear me up from under
Till, rising swift and soon
Unto a passionate noon,
They reach the fullness whereto I was born,
The spring-tide of my days and my sweet marriage-morn.

Or she may be already at her glass
Perplexing hurried fingers with command
And countermand. How many times shall pass
Across the loving background of her hand
Bracelet or brooch or band
Ere to a scruple she assess the claims
Of spidery clasp or quaintly-figured fretting
Or mystic moonstone in a silver setting?
How oft shall leap for her the tiny flames,
Brightnesses without names,
Imprisoned in the gleaming green and white
Of her betrothal ring? Yet should there glow
Upon her bosom gems and jewels bright
As sunny shaft by day or stars at night
The rarest could not show
Such living radiance—No,
She is the jewel whereto I was born
Set in this day of days and my sweet marriage-morn.

Dear Love, when I look back upon the years
Before my life was filled with thoughts of thee,
The long climb but a little hill appears
Lost in the blue of love's immensity,
And like a cloud I see
What once was all my world. How could I live
Ere yet my life was worth the living? How
Be prodigal of love as I am now
When I was poor and little had to give?
But this imperative
Sweet ecstasy that wings my willing soul
From peak to breathless peak (and ever shall
Possess it in sustained high control
Until it seek a yet diviner goal)
Doth now exulting call
Me to love's festival.
This is the height whereunto I was born,
The summit of my days and my sweet marriage-morn.

And so to church! Beloved, when at last
The faithful word is spoken and the kiss
The joyous marriage-kiss hath sealed it fast,
Let us, remembering our unmeasured bliss,
Thank God with tears for this
Transcendent gift of love—the teasing strife,
The uncertain joys of lovers’-love at first,
Before the best in us hath slain the worst;
Then the calm love of husband and of wife,
Love that is more than life,
Richer than kings’ crowns diamonded and pearled,
Gentler than wild-buds in a dreamy lane,
Prouder than a new nation’s flag unfurled,
Love that is wider than the visible world
And stronger than all pain—
Whereby we now attain
The heaven prepared for us when we were born
Against this day of days and our sweet marriage-morn.



By the same author

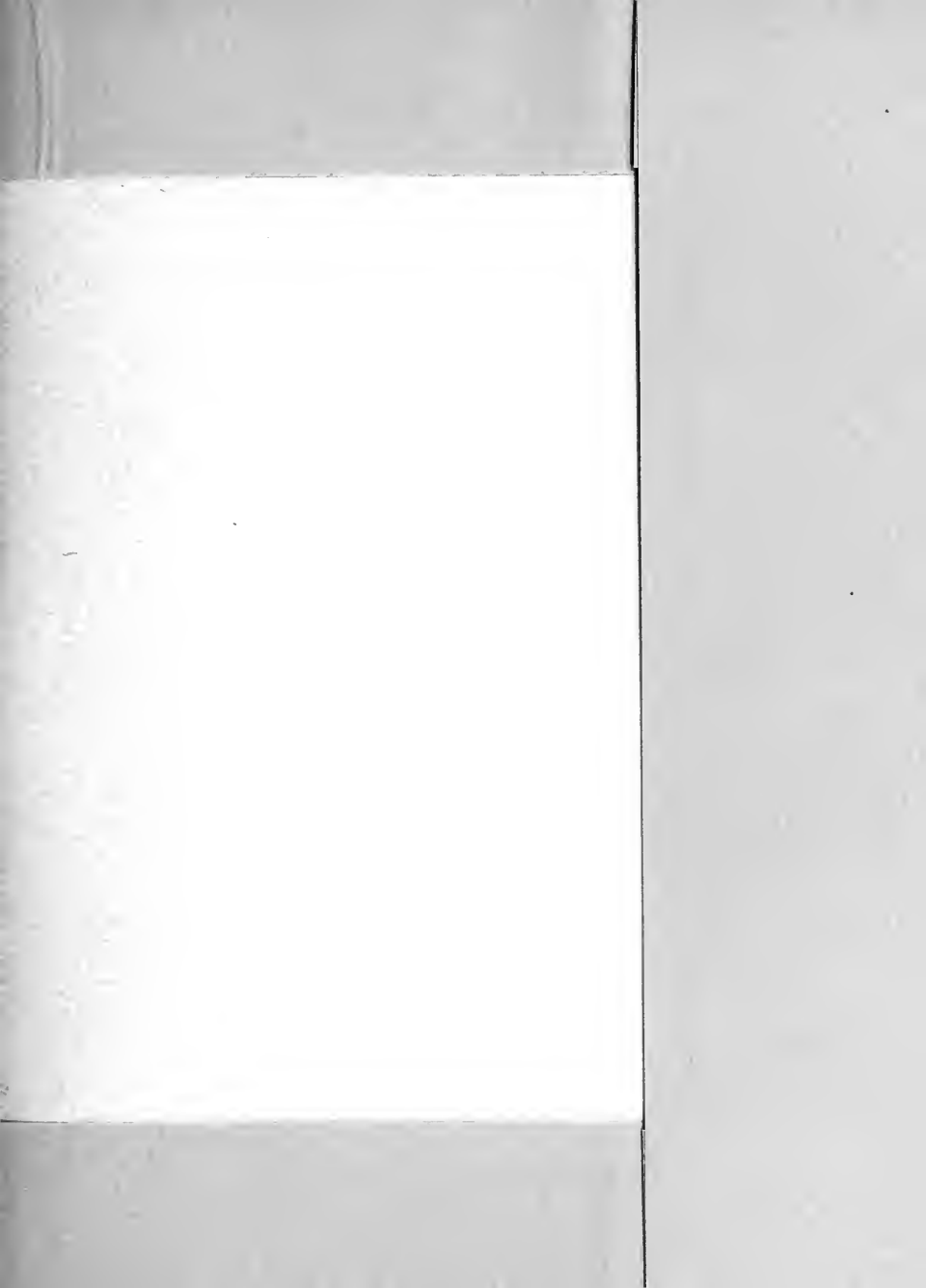
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